



Cuppa cocoa: Linda Sugg and Robin Carney of Coffee Beanery prepare steamy chocolate drinks.

Ancient lore exalts noble cocoa bean

After playing in or shoveling snow, nothing warms you up quite like a steaming cup of cocoa.

It's the perfect comfort drink. And we have the ancient Mayas, the Aztecs and the Spanish explorer Hernando Cortez to thank for it. The Mayas planted the first known cocoa plantations around 600 A.D. They valued cocoa so much that they used the beans as a form of currency.

The Aztecs conquered the Mayas in Mexico about 1200 A.D. During his conquest of Mexico in 1519, Cortez discovered that the Aztecs drank a warm, bitter beverage made from cocoa beans. They considered it a food of the gods. Cortez took the beverage back to Spain, where it was sweetened with sugar, mixed with milk and served hot.

Hot chocolate, or hot cocoa, quickly spread throughout Europe and, for a while, it was considered a royal drink in France. So you see, it never was just for kids.

Here's a sampling of what's out there for modern-day cocoa lovers.

• **Barnie's Coffee & Tea Company**, at Wonderland Mall in Livonia and the Somerset Collection in Troy, uses steamed milk and its own cocoa syrup to make its ready-to-drink premium cocoa; a tall is \$1.59 and a grande is \$1.99. It also sells its own brand of premium cocoa mix in a variety of flavors. One-serving packets are 79 cents; a 1.6-ounce can is \$8.99.

• **Coffee Beanery**, in Birmingham, Royal Oak, West Bloomfield, Troy, Livonia and Westland, uses its own powdered Dutch cocoa mixture and steamed milk (skim or whole) in its gourmet hot chocolate. A tall is \$2.60, including mounds of whipped cream. A grande is \$2.76. It also sells its own brand of instant cocoa mix. Individual packets are 89 cents; a 10-ounce can is \$8.99.

• **Jacobson's** sells Godiva Chocolatier and Cocoa Amore cocoa mixes. The Godiva mixes must be made with milk, not hot water, and come in two flavors, dark chocolate truffle and classic milk chocolate (\$5-\$10 packages). The Cocoa Amore mixes can be made with hot water or milk and come in a variety of flavors; 75 cents for individual packets or \$4 for a 6.25-ounce can.

• **Hudson's** sells tins of Franco instant cocoa in a variety of flavors; \$5.25 for a 7-ounce tin or \$12 for a variety pack of four packets.

• **Gayle's Chocolate**, in Birmingham and Royal Oak, sells hot cocoa cups for \$1 each. They're small truffle cups which you dissolve in hot milk to make hot chocolate. It also sells a hot chocolate gift pack, which includes a big latte mug filled with cocoa cups for \$35. The Royal Oak store has a coffee bar, where you can order a mug of hot chocolate topped with whipped cream and a wafer for \$2.76.

• **Rocky Mountain Chocolate Factory**, at the Somerset Collection in Troy, sells its own cocoa mix in five flavors; \$2.90 for a 2-ounce can and \$6.90 for an 8-ounce can.

• **Lonestar Coffee Co.** in Birmingham uses Ghirardelli milk chocolate and white chocolate (\$1.50 and \$2), and Caribou Coffee, in Birmingham, Rochester Hills, Bloomfield Township, Royal Oak, West Bloomfield and Troy, uses Ghirardelli cocoa blended with chocolate syrup to make their ready-to-drink hot cocoa.

SHOPPING CENTERS



DONNA MULCAHY

Bloomin' bouquets recharge winter souls



BY LINDA BACHRACK PHOTOS BY JERRY ZOLNYSKY

When the landscape is blanketed in white and there's nary a green sprout to be seen, we crave nature's springtime bounty all the more. Witness the abundance of amaryllis and paper white bulbs primed for forcing into full, glorious bloom on our windowsills. And the bunches and bunches of mixed flower bouquets that tempt us near the check-out counter at the grocery store.

The folks at The Community House in Birmingham are savvy to the floral cravings of its members. Thus, they scheduled a flower arranging class in the middle of January at Blossoms, a perpetual sanctuary of floribunda. Co-owners Norm Silk and Dale Morgan gathered participants around a huge worktable laden with the tools of their trade - clear glass vases, stems of flowers and greenery, even a special underwater stem cutter.

To congregants in Blossoms' snug workspace was not only informative, but restorative, and the 20 or so women who attended the session lost themselves in the world of botanicals. Silk and Morgan dazzled their rapt audience with impromptu arrangements, while dishing practical tips.

Once you get that bunch of flowers home from the market or the florist, how do you keep them looking vibrant and healthy? The key, said Silk, is to cut the stems under water before placing them in a vase. Use a sharp knife or the above-mentioned underwater cutter, and make a fresh diagonal cut. If air is allowed to get to the stem, it could form a bubble, inhibiting proper hydration to the bud or blossom. Always put the fresh-cut flowers in warm water, rather than cold. "Blossoms are especially fragile," said Silk, "and it's important to cut them under water. They're easily damaged." Also, trim away any bottom leaves that will be immersed. And always use preservative to keep the bacteria level down. "Routinely bleach your glass vases to rid them of bacteria," said Silk.

Which flowers are hardy and long-lasting, requiring the least amount of care? Silk recommends

orchids, including pink dendrobium, yellow oncidium and purple mokara. They grow best in warm, humid conditions, so mist often with a spray bottle. "They'll last three times longer," Silk said.

Other reliable varieties include freesia, tulips, iris, hyacinth, ginestra (a flower from Italy with a gardenia-like fragrance) and gerbera daisies. Silk and Morgan also like the dramatic effect of curly willow, long twining branches that can be dried and used in a large vase to make a bold statement in an entrance foyer or on a mantel. Quince and forsythia branches stand alone in beautiful clear glass containers and often will blossom if misted regularly.

Flower arrangements use about one inch of water a day, so continue to top off the water as the level goes down. It's always better to arrange in water rather than foam, said Silk. The more traditional florists use a lot of carnations, mums and baby's breath because they're "quite mild water and can be added orange." The two pointed out that flowers that are arranged in water evolve and move and change, much as they would in their natural habitat. "Tulips bend and droop, for instance. Let them look as though they're tumbling out of the vase. They have a mind of their own," said Silk. "Remember, flowers



Petal perfect: Blossoms co-owner Norm Silk (left) teaches the art of floral design, while (above) Ruth Rossetti (left) of Rochester Hills and Sandy Meganck of Shelby Township choose flowers for a bouquet.

are living things. We can't change the color to perfectly match your bridesmaid dress and we can't skimp on a droopy stem. They are the way nature intended."

Silk showed the group how to put together some simple arrangements with just a few stems. For instance, a bouquet of yellow freesia with some feathery bear grass makes a captivating presentation. Bear grass also complements orchids, lilies and tulips. "It's a clean look," he said. He also placed silk flowers in marble-filled glass vases and arranged them like fresh flowers to look realistic. Silk orchids, tulips and calla lilies are surprisingly real looking, especially when combined with curly willow, bear grass or real forsythia.

For a stunning bridal bouquet, Blossoms floral designer Daniel Stober took orange roses, double freesia, ranunculus and seeded eucalyptus and arranged them in concentric circles, Biedermeier-style, embellishing with loops of charruseau ribbon. This nosegay-shaped bouquet was an instant crowd pleaser.

One participant asked Silk if there was a method to making flowers look well-balanced in the vase. He advised her to keep smaller flowers in lighter colors at the top of the arrangement and place darker, heavier flowers in the middle. He also prefers a bouquet of one variety of flower or a maximum of three different varieties in a vase. "It makes a much more dramatic visual statement," he said.

At the end of the session, the women chose bunches of alstromeria, lisianthus, a single rose and some natural foliage, and set about the task of designing their own take-home arrangement. "This could take us into the dinner hour," quipped one novice floral arranger. "We may need a little wine on the worktable."

As they worked, some of the participants discussed what they learned in the \$33 session. "I was glad to get permission to use dried or artificial flowers," said Kristine Olson of Bloomfield Hills. "I've been avoiding them since the '70s. And I was amazed that flowers are grown all over the world and imported to the United States."

"Misting fresh flowers every day - that was a great tip," said Linda Eberly of Birmingham. Karvin DeKor was the first to leave with her professional looking arrangement. "What a great job," complimented Dale Morgan. "She knows her way around an alstromeria."

Despite the gray day outside, there were lots of bright, cheery flowers on dining tables on the evening of the Blossoms floral design class. And certainly the flower arrangements were at least as well-balanced as the meals.

News of special events for shoppers is included in this calendar. Send information to: **Malls & Mainstreets**, c/o Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 805 East Maple, Birmingham, MI 48009; or fax (248) 644-1314. Deadline: Wednesday 5 p.m. for publication on Sunday.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 26

CINEMA CELEBRATION

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the Detroit Film Theater at the Detroit Institute of Arts, and film enthusiasts can celebrate with Elliot Wilhelm's *VideoHound's World Cinema: The Adventurer's Guide to Movie Watching* (Visible Ink Press, \$20). Wilhelm, the respected curator of film for the DIA, will discuss and sign his book at 7 p.m. at Borders in Birmingham, 34300 Woodward. The event includes a raffle of passes to the DFT.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 27

HAUNTING HEARTLAND

Dexter, Mich. author Craig Holden explores new terrain in literary suspense drama with his newest work *Four Corners of Night*, a haunting book about friendship, heroism and the meaning of truth. He signs and discusses his third novel at 7:30 p.m. at Borders in Birmingham, 34300 Woodward.

PASSION FOR PRADA

Saks Fifth Avenue presents the Prada accessories Spring '99 special order collection, 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Informal modeling, 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Somerset Collection, Troy.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 28

TV TELL-ALL

In his autobiography, *Cue the Bunny on the Rain-*

ADDED ATTRACTIONS

bow, director Alan Rafkin recounts his behind-the-scenes experiences working in more than eighty television series, including *The Andy Griffith Show*, *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, *M*A*S*H* and *Murphy Brown*. He signs and discusses his book at 7:30 p.m. at Borders in Birmingham, 34300 Woodward.

WEDDING GOWN GURU

Peter Langner of Rome, Italy, known internationally for his stunning, handmade original bridal gowns, hosts a trunk show of his newest creations at Roma Sposa Bridal Salon in Birmingham. Today, 10 a.m.-8 p.m. Continues Friday, Jan. 29 and Saturday, Jan. 30. Appointments required (248) 723-4900, 722 N. Old Woodward.

SKIN PICKS

Sally's Design presents a trunk show by aKin, a line of elegant special-occasion gowns in beautiful imported fabrics and laces. Show continues Friday, Jan. 29 and Saturday, Jan. 30.

CHIC ST. JOHN

Jacobson's Birmingham hosts the St. John Spring 1999 Collection show featuring day-to-evening wear in knit suits and dresses in the season's hottest colors of navy, taupe, and azule, bright with red. The show is at 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Designer Salon, 336 W. Maple Road.

CHANEL SHOW

Neiman Marcus presents the Chanel Spring 1999 trunk show, 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Couture Salon. Informal modeling 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Somerset Collection, Troy.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 29

DESIGNING TRIO

Saks Fifth Avenue presents Spring 1999 collections from Alberta Ferretti, Narciso Rodriguez and Cheap & Chic by Moschino, 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Informal modeling 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Designer Sportswear, second floor, Somerset Collection, Troy.

COLLECTORS CORNER

Visit Tel-Twelve Mall this weekend for a Card, Coin, Stamp and Sports Collectibles Show. Mall hours, today through Sunday. Win valuable door prizes, including Beanie Babies.

FAMILY FORUM

Great Lakes Crossing and Wise Mothers present Focus on Families. Kids, moms and dads can leap and soar on the Velcro Wall, tumble through the Olympic Obstacle Course and blast off in the Bungee Race. Afterwards, a Parents' Workshop focuses on why so many American children are overweight. Kids Fun: 5:30-7:15 p.m. Workshop: 7:30-8:15 p.m. On Sat., Jan. 30, the workshop topic is Taming Temper Tantrums (6:30-7:15 p.m.) Great Lakes Walk section of the mall. Register by calling (248) 454-6000.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 31

SEWING CIRCLE

Haberern Fabric presents its second annual Super Bowl Football Widows Sewing Extrude at 12-6 p.m., 117 W. Fourth Street, Royal Oak. Highlights include a Problem Solving Clinic, 12:15-4:30 p.m., devoted to answering questions on projects you bring in, and four free 15-minute sewing demonstrations. Enjoy light refreshments. Pre-registration required. Call (248) 641-0010.